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The Unwomanly Face Of War: An Oral History Of Women In World War II



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Synopsis

A long-awaited English translation of the groundbreaking oral history of women in World War II across Europe and Russia - from the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature. For more than three decades, Svetlana Alexievich has been the memory and conscience of the 20th century. When the Swedish Academy awarded her the Nobel Prize, it cited her invention of "a new kind of literary genre", describing her work as "a history of emotions...a history of the soul". In The Unwomanly Face of War, Alexievich chronicles the experiences of the Soviet women who fought on the front lines, on the home front, and in the occupied territories. These women - more than a million in total - were nurses and doctors, pilots, tank drivers, machine-gunners, and snipers. They battled alongside men, and yet, after the victory, their efforts and sacrifices were forgotten. Alexievich traveled thousands of miles and visited more than 100 towns to record these women’s stories. Together this symphony of voices reveals a different aspect of the war - the everyday details of life in combat left out of the official histories. Translated by the renowned Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, The Unwomanly Face of War is a powerful and poignant account of the central conflict of the 20th century, a kaleidoscopic portrait of the human side of war. "But why? I asked myself more than once. Why, having stood up for and held their own place in a once absolutely male world, have women not stood up for their history? Their words and feelings? They did not believe themselves. A whole world is hidden from us. Their war remains unknown...I want to write the history of that war. A women’s history." (Svetlana Alexievich)

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Customer Reviews

There aren’t enough stars for this book, the best war chronicle ever written.Theirs was the first generation lifted from serfdom, they became doctors, nurses, pilots, snipers, drivers, tank commanders, partisans and regular infantry. They were wounded, tortured, raped and killed. After indescribable horrors they returned to their villages and were often rejected as trench whores. The book is not nihilistic but very sobering: A species that produces such people has a fighting chance. It is essential for anyone wishing to understand Russia, Communism, or German fascism.One fragment: "As soon as I begin telling this story, I get sick again. IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢m talking, my insides turn to jelly, everything is shaking. I see it all again, I picture it: how the dead lieÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •their mouths are open, they were shouting something and never finished shouting, their guts are ripped out. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¦And how frightening! How frightening is hand-to-hand combat, where men go at each other with bayonetsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¦Bare bayonets. You start stammering, for several days you canÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t get the words out correctly. You lose speech. Can those who werenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t there understand this? How do you tell about it? With what face? Well, answer meÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •with what face should I remember this? Others can somehowÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¦TheyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢re able toÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¦But meÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •no. I weep. Yet this must be preserved, it must."Alexievich, Svetlana. The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II (p. 330). Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

A truly great book. To say it is moving is a huge understatement. These women suffered as teenagers what most people can not even imagine. The war was a holocaust beyond imagination. They saw things happen that are burned into their memories. Each woman’s statement complements and expounds on the others. It is not an easy read. But it gives you a unique perspective on war and why it must be prevented in all cases. These horrors do not justify the world that resulted as a result. So many lives were shattered and the political ramifications were not a solution either. Their stories should be recorded for history and taught to our children in every country. Alexievich deserves the Nobel Prize more than any other writer. It must be hell to catalogue these stories, and this was only her first book, which is expanded with material that was censored when the book was first released in the 1980’s. She has gone on the write similar books on Chernobyl, the Afghan war, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. But this is her gem. You can not read it straight through. You have to read it in segments and then take some time to reflect on it. Utterly devastating!

Her first book to use her participant account constructed narrative, Alexievich's prose isn't quite as polished as her subsequent books, but it's still outstanding. With some additional content repatriates in a post-Soviet censor world, we get some new materials as well.

Listening to the voices of women who had to fight for their country and at the same time preserve their feeling of being a woman was hard to take but gave a face to a horrible time in our past. Too bad we are doomed to repeat it

One of the most shattering and thought provoking books of our era - The author's oral history approach adds a new genre to our approach to literature - you may have heard bits and pieces of the story in other books, but never in such a grand scale - it is all there, horror, bravery, suffering but this is also about innocence and the helplessness that it brings in the aftermath

Weighty insight into Russian/Soviet life and survival.

Fascinating human stories of dire times, compelling written.

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